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News Release

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5 plead guilty to distributing heroin, cocaine

The last of five defendants connected to a Minneapolis drug trafficking organization pleaded guilty last week in federal court for his involvement in the operation.

On Aug. 7 in Minneapolis, before United States District Chief Judge Michael Davis, Phat Minh Nguyen, 35, St. Paul, pleaded guilty to one count of using a communication facility in causing and facilitating the commission of felony controlled substance violations. Nguyen was indicted, along with four other defendants on Jan. 8, and those four other defendants have already pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to distribute heroin and cocaine.

The co-defendants are: Christian Hernandez-Seldana, 33, Fridley; Ramiro Cuevas-Martinez, 35, Brooklyn Park; Eddy Medina-Garza, 22, Brooklyn Park; and Feliz Murguia-Garcia, 36, Brooklyn Park.

According to their respective plea agreements, between May 1, 2007, and Dec. 20, 2007, they conspired to distribute controlled substances, including heroin and cocaine.

According to a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) affidavit, the defendants were part of an operation responsible for distributing heroin and cocaine throughout Minneapolis. Heroin is a highly addictive and dangerous opiate manufactured from morphine, which is extracted from poppy plants. Cocaine is a powerfully addictive stimulant that directly affects the brain.

Investigators learned that customers would telephone in orders to Hernandez-Seldana and arrange to meet to purchase the drugs. Hernandez-Seldana would generally direct the customer to a set of cross streets in south Minneapolis and give a time frame to meet.

Cuevas-Martinez, Medina-Garza and Murguia-Garcia were "runners" for the organization, who would deliver the drugs to customers. Nguyen was a frequent customer who obtained heroin from the organization for others and attempted to warn the group of police surveillance.

On July 16, 2007, the Minneapolis Police Department's Narcotics Unit executed a search warrant at a Richfield residence, and seized several ounces of heroin, \$40,000 and more than 1

ounce of cocaine. During the search, officers observed Hernandez-Seldana and another man driving by watching the residence.

On several dates between Oct. 26, 2007 and Dec. 17, 2007, law enforcement arranged controlled buys of heroin and cocaine from the organization. The heroin amounts ranged from 1.2 grams to 6.5 grams, and the cocaine amounts ranged from 1 gram to 1.6 grams. According to the affidavit, the drugs were sold at various times from Hernandez-Seldana, Cuevas-Martinez, Medina-Garza and Murguia-Garcia.

On Dec. 20, 2007, agents executed a search warrant at Hernandez-Seldana's Fridley residence, and recovered approximately 400 grams of heroin, 81 grams of cocaine and cash.

"The DEA is proud to have been a partner with the Minneapolis Police Department and Northwest Metro Drug Task Force in this significant investigation," said Dan Moren, assistant special agent in charge of the DEA's Minneapolis District Office. "The decimation of this organization, arguably one of the largest heroin rings operating in Minneapolis, brings closure and the residents of south Minneapolis can find solace in knowing that this organization will no longer endanger the quality of life for its citizens."

Each of the five defendants face a potential maximum penalty of life in prison and a \$4 million fine. Sentencing dates have not been scheduled. This case is the result of an investigation by the DEA, the Minneapolis Police Department and the Northwest Metro Drug Task Force, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven L. Schleicher.